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STATE NORMAL  
MAGAZINE  
NORTH CAROLINA

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J. G. RAMSAY.

# STATE NORMAL MAGAZINE.

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VOL. IV.

GREENSBORO, N. C., MAY, 1900.

NO. 3

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## THE CONFEDERATE CONGRESS.

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JAMES G. RAMSAY, M. D.

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The Confederate Congress was known as the Provisional and the Permanent. The first Provisional Congress met in Montgomery, Alabama, on the 4th of February, 1861, at the instance of the legislature of Mississippi. It was composed of delegates chosen by conventions of the five gulf states, with Georgia and South Carolina. These met as one body and voted by states, each state having one vote. Howell Cobb, of Georgia, was elected President, and Johnson J. Hooper, of Alabama, Secretary. A provisional constitution was adopted. Jefferson Davis, of Mississippi, was chosen President, and Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia, Vice-

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President of the Confederacy, and were duly inaugurated on the 18th day of February.

The Texas ordinance of secession was submitted on the 15th, but the delegates from that state did not take their seats until the 2nd of March. North Carolina had not then seceded, but David L. Swain, M. W. Ransom and John L. Bridgers, having been appointed commissioners by the Legislature, were admitted to seats as such, by the congress, on the second day of its session.

This congress held five sessions—two in Montgomery, and three in Richmond, and adjourned *sine die*, on the 17th of February, 1862.

In the meantime Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee having seceded, and delegates from these states, and Kentucky and Missouri having been admitted, with a delegate from the Territory of Arizona (although Kentucky and Missouri had not seceded), the whole number of members at the close was about one hundred and fifteen. It was an able body, especially during its first session, when nearly one half of its members were ex-members of the United States Congress.

The delegates from North Carolina were first admitted July 20th, 1861, at Richmond. They consisted of the following very able and experienced gentlemen, viz: George W. Davis, W. W. Avery, W. N. H. Smith, Thomas D. McDowell, A. W. Venable, John M. Morehead, R. C. Puryear, A. T. Davidson, Burton Craige and Thomas Ruffin.

#### PERMANENT CONGRESS.

The first permanent congress convened in Richmond on the 18th day of February, 1862, and consisted of two Senators from each of the thirteen states represented, and one hundred and six Representatives, and four delegates from the Territories. George Davis and William T. Dortch were the Senators from North Carolina, and the Representatives were Robert R. Bridgers, Owen R. Keenan, Thomas D. McDowell, Thomas S. Ashe, J. R. McLean, William Lander, Burges S. Gaither, A. T. Davidson, W. N. H. Smith, and Archibald H. Arrington.

This Congress held four sessions in Richmond in two years, and enacted most of the laws of the Confederacy. It was accused—I will not say justly—of too much subserviency to the Executive, and for nearly all of the enactments considered oppressive, by the people. It expired, by limitation, on the 18th of February, 1864.

*The second and last Permanent Congress* convened in Richmond on the 2nd of



May, 1864. The changes in this, compared with the preceding congress, were remarkable and significant. The new Senators were Richard W. Walker, from Alabama; Augustus H. Garland, Arkansas; John W. C. Watson, Mississippi, and W. A. Graham, from North Carolina. The changes in the House were so numerous as, almost, to amount to a new congress. Georgia led in this change, returning nine new, out of its ten members. North Carolina came next with seven out of ten. Texas four out of six, etc. It was remarkable that but few changes were made in the delegations from Kentucky and Missouri. The seven new Representatives from North Carolina were James T. Leach, Josiah Turner, Jr., John A. Gilmer, James M. Leach, George W. Logan, James G. Ramsay, and Thomas C. Fuller. Of these, Gilmer and J. M. Leach had been members of the United States Congress; the others had some legislative experience, with the exception, I believe, of Messrs. Logan and Fuller.

R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia, was elected President pro tem. of the Senate, and Thomas S. Bocock, also of Virginia, was again elected Speaker of the House, having occupied that position in the preceding congress. The outlook of the Confederacy, at this time, was gloomy and discouraging. Furious and unrelenting war had raged for more than three years. Lincoln had called out eight hundred thousand men, at a cost of nearly three thousand million dollars, and was preparing to call for as many more men, at even a greater outlay of money. The Mississippi river was in his possession from mouth to source—thus cutting the Confederacy in twain. The whole Atlantic and Gulf coast, with the exception of the ports of Charleston, Savannah and Mobile, which were closely blockaded, were in the possession of the enemy. Albert Sydney Johnston and "Stonewall" Jackson had fallen—the one in the hour of defeat, the other in the hour of victory, while hundreds of other leaders, the pride and hope of the country, with thousands of the rank and file of the army, had fallen on bloody fields of strife. The gallant Lee had retired from Maryland and Pennsylvania after the terrible conflicts of Antietam and Gettysburg. Grant with more than a hundred thousand veterans was entering the Wilderness, to be held at bay by Lee with less than half that number; and Sherman with an army nearly equal to Grant's was bearing down upon Johnston, who stood at Dalton with fifty-five thousand to dispute his "march to the sea."

But let us return to the action of Congress. The three subjects which mainly attracted the attention of that body were, the support and recruiting of the army;

the suspension of the Writ of Habeas Corpus, and negotiations for peace. The President, backed by a majority in Congress, sought to allay rising discontent, and avert impending evils by adding to the exactions of existing laws, heavier impositions, and more rigorous executions. But tythe and impressment laws could not be duplicated and enforced upon an exhausted people, who demanded their repeal rather than enforcement. Neither could recruits for the army be obtained, for nearly the whole of the white male population, from seventeen to sixty years of age, was already subject to call under existing laws.

The alternative, in the opinion of many was subjugation or the arming of the slaves. The delegation from North Carolina was opposed to the latter, without being in favor of the former. On the 27th of January, 1865, the House having under consideration the Senate bill for the employment of free negroes and slaves on fortifications and in hospitals, Mr. Ramsay moved as a proviso "that said slaves shall not be armed or used as soldiers." Mr. Miles supported the proviso, but in the midst of his speech the House went into secret session. On the 29th the proviso was voted down and the bill passed. Mr. Barksdale's bill for the employment of negro troops passed the House on the 10th of February, but was rejected in the Senate by a tie vote—Wigfall and Maxwell expressing<sup>g</sup> unqualified opposition, Graham, Orr and Hunter speaking against it, but the latter gentleman voting for it, under instructions from the legislature of his state. On the 9th of March the House agreed to an amendment by the Senate to a bill arming the slaves, by a vote of 40 to 26, and the bill became a law.

#### HABEAS CORPUS.

In November, 1864, the President sent a message to congress, in secret session, urging the suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus, alleging the existence of a *secret treasonable conspiracy*, originated by the enemy, called Heroes of America, as prevalent in southwestern Virginia, part of east Tennessee, and the bordering counties of North Carolina, and as having, even, penetrating into the army. The message was referred to the judiciary committee, which reported the indential bill passed on the preceding 15th of February, but which had expired in August, and recommended its re-enactment. Russell and Rieves of Virginia and others spoke ably in advocacy, while Baldwin, Miles, and others spoke against it with equal power. The whole delegation from North Carolina opposed its passage. As a por-

tion of the latter state was implicated, Mr. Ramsay felt called upon to say, that so far as the Heroes of America were concerned there was neither secrecy nor danger. Every thing connected with the order had been revealed and published in his state months ago, *and while the writ was suspended*. The President had made no arrests then, although called upon to do so. Why did he wish to be clothed with the power now? "This looks so inconsistent," said he, "as to justify a suspicion that the existence of this order is made a pretext for the acquisition of power to be used for other purposes."

The bill passed the House by a vote of 37 to 32, but was killed in the Senate by a vote of 8 to 6. On the 13th of March the President sent a second message urging the suspension of the writ, but Congress and the President had divergent views on this subject, and the former failed to carry out the views of the latter on this important subject.

#### NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE.

Many members of this Congress, especially the new members, had found it necessary to promise their constituents to make efforts to obtain negotiations for peace. And anxious eyes were turned toward Congress, in the hope that relief might be obtained from the burdens of war, otherwise than through fields of strife and blood. Repeated peace propositions had been made in the Federal Congress. These had uniformly failed, but had been sustained by a respectable minority. On the 14th of December, '63, Fernando Wood introduced a resolution in the House, requesting Mr. Lincoln to appoint commissioners to treat with the authorities at Richmond to restore this Union "upon terms of equity, fraternity and equality, under the Constitution." Fifty-nine, out of one hundred and fifty-seven, votes were cast in favor of this proposition. Sixteen days after this, Governor Vance wrote to Mr. Davis that the recent action of the Federal House, though meaning but little, had greatly excited the public hope that the Northern mind was looking towards peace—that it seemed to him that "we might with propriety constantly tender negotiations."

The reply of the President was:

"This struggle must continue until the enemy is beaten out of his vain confidence of our subjugation."

I cannot stop here to enumerate all the sources of discontent among the people, nor the grounds of hope of those who looked for peace. I can only allude to the fact of the representation in Congress from Kentucky, Missouri and parts of

Virginia, Louisiana and Tennessee, by those who had no constituency that could be reached by Confederate legislation—those states and parts of states, either never having left the Union, or having returned after having left; and to the additional fact that there was a growing distrust, as we shall see as we proceed, of the President himself and his Cabinet in certain quarters. Suffice it to say just here, that the attitude of the President, backed as he was by a majority in the Senate and two-thirds in the House, effectually paralyzed all efforts at negotiations for peace, except upon the unattainable basis of the complete independence of the Confederacy. Thus it was that when Mr. J. T. Leach at one time and Mr. Turner at another, in compliance with promises made to their constituents, introduced resolutions looking towards peace, the House immediately went into secret session, from which the resolutions never emerged. And thus it was throughout.

In his message November 7, '64, the President took a hopeful and sanguine view of the situation. "Atlanta," said he, "had fallen, but would be of no ultimate advantage to the enemy, and had we been compelled to evacuate Richmond the Confederacy would remain as defiant as ever. No military success of the enemy can accomplish the destruction of the Confederacy."

But the military situation grew more alarming and critical, and the determination of the people for negotiations for a secession of hostilities and for peace, in some form or other, grew stronger instead of weaker. The President and his Cabinet became the objects of attack. Mr. Seddon retired as Secretary of War and General Breckenridge succeeded him. Governor Brown, of Georgia, in a message to the Legislature of that state, asserted that "our government was now a military despotism, drifting into anarchy, and, if the present policy is persisted in, must terminate in reconstruction, with or without subjugation." And, after recommending the taking from the President his power as commander-in-chief, and the calling of a convention to amend the Constitution, he uttered these thrilling words, "The night is dark, the tempest howls, the ship is lashed with turbulent waves, the helmsman is steering to the whirlpool, our remonstrances are unheeded, and we must restrain him, or the crew must sink together, buried in irretrievable ruin."

But, before this philippic had been delivered, Congress had passed the act creating the office of commander-in-chief of all the armies of the Confederacy, and General Lee had been appointed to that exalted position.

It is due to the President to state that he had made to two or more unavailing



efforts at negotiations—just how far he authorized the Niagara conference in July '64, and the visit of the Blairs to Richmond in January, '65, I fail to know; but on the 28th of the latter month he authorized Messrs. Stephens, Hunter and Campbell to hold a peace conference in Hampton Roads with Mr. Lincoln and Secretary Seward. The conference failed of peaceful results, because our commissioners were not authorized to make peace on any other terms than the recognition of the independence of the Confederacy.

Now came the last grand effort to "fire the Southern heart" anew. On the 9th of February an immense mass meeting was held in the African church in Richmond, presided over by Mr. Hunter. Speeches were made by the President, Mr. Benjamin, Mr. Gilmer and others, which were enthusiastically applauded, and resolutions were passed mutually pledging life, fortune and sacred honor to maintain liberty and independence. This was followed by many similar meetings throughout the country. But they were the flickerings, only, of the expiring lamp.

And, now, many brave and true men seeing that the resources of the Confederacy were exhausted and that the united action of the states had failed to secure a cessation of hostilities, began seriously to contemplate and propose separate state action. But to this—the very cornerstone of the Confederacy—the President was as resolutely opposed, as he was to compromise of any kind, because it involved reconstruction.

And here, at the risk of being prolix, I wish to show the position of Governor Graham, as well as that of the President, on this vital subject. Senator Oldham, of Texas, in an article in *De Bow's Review* for October, 1869, speaks as follows:

"A few days after the Hampton Roads' conference a committee, consisting of Messrs. Orr, Graham and Johnston, was appointed, by the Senate, to confer with the President and ascertain what he proposed to do under the existing condition of affairs. In a few days they made a verbal report, through Mr. Graham. Among other things they stated that they had inquired of the President his views and opinions with regard to proposing to the United States to negotiate for peace upon the basis of the Confederacy returning to the Union, and that the President had answered 'that he had no power to negotiate a treaty upon such a basis; \* \* \* that the states alone, each acting for itself, in its sovereign capacity, could make such a treaty.'

"Mr. Graham said he gave notice that in a few days he would introduce a res-

olution in favor of opening negotiations with the United States upon the basis of a return to the Union by the states of the Confederacy. \* \* \* The notice was received *in such a manner* that he never offered his resolution."

On the 13th of March—just five days before Congress adjourned—the President sent in a message, stating that the enemy was jubilant, our people greatly discouraged and Richmond in greater danger than at any time before during the war; that the people were looking to Congress for relief, but that the measures passed for recruiting the army were inadequate. And he recommended more vigorous impressments for supplies, the abolition of all exemptions from military duty, the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* and the impressment of all the gold and silver coin of the country if it could not be borrowed.

To this message Congress replied, through a committee, that all the measures recommended by the President to promote the efficiency of the army have been adopted, except the entire repeal of class exemptions and some measures suggested by him, such as the creation of the office of general-in-chief, were originated and passed by Congress with a view to the restoration of public confidence by the energetic administration of military affairs. \* \* \* Congress does not concur in the opinion of the President that the suspension of the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* is indispensable to the successful conduct of the war.

On the 18th of March, 1865, Congress met for the last time. Its sessions were in secret. A bill amending the impressment laws was passed; also a bill authorizing the impressment of three million dollars in coin, if it could not be borrowed; and in case of a future loan, the levying of a tax of twenty-five per cent. on all the gold and silver coin, bullion and foreign exchange, in the Confederacy, pledging the cotton and tobacco of the government for payment.

Mr. Watson, on behalf of the joint committee appointed to wait on the President and inform him of the readiness of Congress to adjourn, reported that the committee had discharged that duty and that the President had stated that he had no further communication to make; that in his recent message he had fully explained his views as to the legislation needed by the country; \* \* \* but to the full extent of his power and the resources placed at his disposal all might feel assured of his purpose, faithfully to protect and defend the country.

Congress then adjourned to meet in the following October. But it was to meet no more. In sixteen days Richmond was evacuated—the Confederate stores and

warehouses were set on fire, against the protest of the citizens, by our retreating forces; the legislature of Virginia was on its way to another seat for its deliberations, and the President, with a portion of his Cabinet and all the coin of the government, was hastening toward the savannas of the South. Seven days more and Lee had laid down his sword at Appomattox and the end had come, not alone of Congress, but of the Confederacy.

The bravest now saw what the wisest had long foreseen—an end of strife and bloodshed, for which the friends of peace had longed and prayed.

SALISBURY, N. C., March 22, 1900.

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### OPPORTUNITY.

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The key of yesterday  
I threw away  
And now too late  
Before to-morrow's close-locked gate  
Helpless I stand—in vain to pray!  
In vain to sorrow!  
Only the key of yesterday  
Unlocks to-morrow.

PRISCILLA LEONARD.

## ZACK THOMPSON, THE BLACKSMITH.

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LUCY MCGEE GLENN.

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The dingy little blacksmith shop stands at the foot of the hill behind the village graveyard, its only avenue of approach being the narrow road that winds down the hill to the left of the old rock wall over which the tall tombstones stare through the long days and nights. A little distance from the shop may be seen the home of the blacksmith. Here the usual order of things seems to be reversed. The vegetable garden instead of being in the rear is just in front of the house. In fact, the corn patch extends to the very doorstep, while the pumpkin vines that twine about the cornstalks climb up over the porch and facing of the door and hang a big yellow pumpkin on the door knob. The house can scarcely be seen from the front, it is such an insignificant thing compared with the corn and the pumpkins. In the back yard smutty pots and kettles, dingy feather beds and pillows, with various other household furnishings, are displayed as if for sale. The shop is smutty and dingy—all blacksmith shops are; but the home, if such it may be called, is smuttier and dingier and infinitely more dreary.

On a gusty November night, when the wind moans in the trees like lost souls, and grewsome shadows from the forge fire flit around the entrance of the shop, the smith delights to tell ghost tales to the little boys who steal away from their mammas after tea. He is a tall, broad-shouldered half-breed, or “yaller nigger,” with clean-cut features and keen black eyes; on the whole, somewhat like an Indian. To-night he has only one little boy to listen to his tales, and while he talks he sharpens the little boy’s knife. He finishes the knife with the story and the two gaze at the fire.

“Well, Uncle Zack,” says the little boy, “if you’d go to sleep like other folks I don’t believe the hanks would pester you. Mamma says the’ aint no such things, anyhow.”

“Lord, chile, you ain’t got no sense in yo’ head. Sposin’ you had the heart disease, what guv yer the pulsions every time yer laid down, then, howd’d yer keep from seein’ de hants?”

“Now, Uncle Zack, you know you haven’t got the heart disease,” says the little boy.



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